

CITY OF MIAMI BEACH  
Office of the City Manager  
Letter to Commission No. 043-2004



**To:** Mayor David Dermer and  
Members of the City Commission

**Date:** February 13, 2004

**From:** Jorge M. Gonzalez  
City Manager

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jorge".

**Subject:** **ORGANIZATIONAL STATUS OF THE BEACH PATROL**

During the City Commission's discussion and approval of the 2004 Budget, questions were raised about the organizational status of the Beach Patrol and whether or not it would be appropriate to move the division to a different place in the organization. At the time of the budget discussion the most discussed option for the Beach Patrol was to move to the Fire Department as a division.

The CWA Union also raised the possibility of the Beach Patrol becoming its own independent department. Each of these options have been evaluated and the purpose of this LTC is to inform the Commissioners of the direction we plan to pursue regarding the Beach Patrol after our discussion at the Neighborhood Committee meeting on February 17, 2004.

As a result of the analysis of organization options available, including leaving the Beach Patrol within the Parks and Recreation Department, it is my intention to move the Beach Patrol into the Fire Department as a division. The analysis shows that while any of the options may be possible, moving the Beach Patrol into the Fire Department as the Ocean Rescue Division provides the greatest opportunity to enhance the Beach Patrol capabilities and specifically its ability to deliver public safety services to visitors and residents.

In assessing the options of leaving the Beach Patrol as a part of the Parks and Recreation Department and in having the Beach Patrol become its own independent department, all but the Fire Department option presented an obvious and very problematic limitation. One of the principle concerns raised both by the Commission and by the CWA Union was that in its current department location the Beach Patrol did not enable a high enough focus on the public safety service that was delivered and did not easily allow elevating that focus to a higher level than currently exists. Leaving the Beach Patrol in the Parks and Recreation Department or allowing it to become its own independent department would not provide for a different focus in public safety nor elevate the attention provided to the Beach Patrol service. The same leadership, the same organizational structure and the same general approach to business would be present in either of those two options.

Moving the Beach Patrol to the Fire Department to become the Ocean Rescue Division has the distinct service and organizational advantage of merging the Beach Patrol with an established, highly regarded and successful part of the organization whose focus is solely on public safety. The Fire Department's public safety role has expanded over time to be

more encompassing and the Beach Patrol as an addition thereto is not only consistent with what other municipalities have undertaken but also a consistent and logical expansion of the public safety service that is provided and managed by the Fire Department.

As the City Commission is aware, the Fire Department's sole mission is the provision of public safety services and all of their activities, their training, their support equipment and facilities are oriented to that single purpose. While the Beach Patrol has done well in terms of expansion and provision of resources in the Parks and Recreation Division, there are clearly several missions within the Parks Department that are not present in the Fire Department merger option. The independent Ocean Rescue or Beach Patrol Department might also achieve a single purpose or focus similar to that in the Fire Department but would not achieve the broader organizational improvements that are possible by being included as part of the Fire Department.

Merging the Beach Patrol with the Fire Department would also provide for improved training, improved facility access and improved coordination between services which must regularly function together in the provision of public safety services in the beach environment. Service delivery consistency and improvement should be achieved in many ways. A prime example is having the Beach Patrol medical responses now covered under the Fire Department's Medical Directors Protocols and Discipline. This will focus an elevated and much more stringent level of attention to the medical protocols which must be followed in Beach Patrol rescues and procedures and coordinate the two responders under the same protocol.

Beyond the benefit of the focus on the public safety mission and organizational enhancements and improvements, the Fire Department is also in a position to readily merge with Beach Patrol with no additional costs or organizational restructuring. The Beach Patrol would be assigned to an existing Assistant Fire Chief and would operate with the exact same number of Fire personnel and Beach Patrol personnel that exist currently. By moving the Beach Patrol into the Fire Department in this fashion, no duplication of administrative services would be created as would be the case if the Beach Patrol were its own independent department. In the independent department environment, a duplication of administrative support services involved with payroll, procurement, human resources and a variety of other services would need to be replicated where that is not the case in either its current Parks environment or within the Fire Department. Also in the independent department environment, additional personnel at the supervisory level would likely be necessary to allow the department to function in an independent capacity. The movement from one department to another existing department is the most efficient and effective use of resources without unnecessary duplication. The assignment of added resources to support a new independent department would only serve to add financial stress to the entire organization and direct resources that otherwise could be directly applied to the provision of public safety services.

In every aspect there is clearly an advantage to moving the Beach Patrol into the Fire Department as an operating division. The only potential down side of merging the Beach Patrol and Fire Department is the possibility that Beach Patrol members would seek to become members of the Fire Fighters Union and seek similar pay and benefits to those enjoyed by the full time professional fire fighters. While this is a possibility, it is one that would only be achieved by virtue of contract negotiations and the City will clearly be a

participant in such negotiations and can make conscious choices and decisions along the way in this area.

The current plan is to have the merger of the Fire Department and Beach Patrol occur in early April so as to allow for a gradual and planned transition of the services. This will also enable the Beach Patrol to get through one of the busiest months of its season so as to be able to appropriately focus on merger coordination.

The Fire Department has already met with Parks Department personnel and CWA Union leadership to discuss aspects of the transition. The Fire Department has started to identify short, medium and long term issues and objectives from the merger, which can be discussed at the upcoming Neighborhood/Community Affairs Committee meeting. Prior to the Committee meeting, I will also be meeting with CWA Union leadership to discuss the department merger.

As a side benefit, the Administration has also been able to rejuvenate discussions with the IZOD Corporation regarding the provision of uniforms both to the Beach Patrol and to its new home department, the Fire Department. This represents an expansion of the previous agreement that was being negotiated by the Administration to include all of the members of the Fire Department as well as the Beach Patrol. The street value of uniform items for the two areas will exceed \$200,000. IZOD has also agreed in principal to provide the majority of costs (\$15,000) toward the provision of a new life guard stand which was desired by the members of the City Commission as part of the annual budget approval. Further, other uniform and clothing items for use by City employees in other departments and divisions would be available at cost, thereby allowing the City to upgrade its uniform and clothing items provided and still save money throughout the course of a year. IZOD Corporation has agreed to cooperate fully with the City in the redesign of the Fire Department and Ocean and Rescue uniform and logo items so that they are compatible and consistent with the newly expanded Fire Department.

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